Canada

CANADIAN COAST GUARD AIR CUSHION VEHICLES (HOVERCRAFT)

Southern British Columbia is known for its sheltered waterways, beautiful scenery and normally benevolent weather. The area is also known for its unusual marine hazards, such as large areas of drying mud flats, powerful tidal rapids and whirlpools. These hazards lead to unusual problems for a large inshore fishing fleet and for one of North America's largest recreational boating fleets.

This marine environment means that much of the search and rescue workload is of an unusual nature. For this reason, the Canadian Coast Guard uses an unusual vehicle - the hovercraft - in appropriate areas.

In the Western Region, two SRN6 hovercraft are based at Vancouver International Airport on the middle arm of the Fraser River. They cover an area bordered by Desolation Sound and Campbell River in the north and the American border in the south.

Air cushion vehicles, or hovercraft, are different from other marine vessels in that they travel on a fan-generated cushion of air that reduces surface friction and allows amphibious operations and high speeds.

Propulsion is provided by a variable pitch air propeller and power is supplied by a Rolls-Royce Gnome marine gas turbine engine of 1100 horsepower.

The hovercraft used by the Canadian Coast Guard are SRN6 MK1's that were built by the British Hovercraft Corporation and extensively modified to meet Canadian Coast Guard search and rescue requirements. The craft are 14.7 metres long, seven metres wide and weigh 8500 kilograms (kg).

The craft may operate at full power for up to 10 hours and carry up to 4000 kg payload if necessary. Top speed in good conditions is 60 knots and the normal cruise is 40 knots.

Crew training and craft instrumentation allow the craft to operate in zero visibility and in all but the most extreme weather conditions in its coverage area. Each craft is equipped with the full range of marine and aircraft radio and direction finding equipment, radar, Loran-C, electronic chart, plotting and search pattern displays.

HOVERCRAFT

Particulars:

Length, Overall	**14.7 metres**
Width	**7.0 metres**
Weight	**8500 kg**
Top speed	**60 knots**
Cruising speed	**40 knots**
Power	**1100 HP**
Payload	**4000 kg**

Crew medical training and equipment are extensive and in-the-water rescue swimmers are part of the crew. However, operational emphasis is on high speed rapid response. Hovercraft search and rescue equipment includes two 65 million candlepower searchlights, firefighting equipment, towing and limited vessel salvage gear.

Quite apart from standard marine and aircraft emergency response, the hovercraft are frequently tasked to perform medical evacuations from remote or isolated places. Besides the search and rescue duties, the hovercraft can be called to service navigational aids and perform pollution prevention assignments.

The hovercraft also assist other government departments, such as the Department of Fisheries, police, and environmental agencies.

The Canadian Coast Guard operates one other hovercraft on the St. Lawrence River in Quebec. This craft is primarily assigned to aids to navigation and icebreaking duties.

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